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ABSTRACT

This paper provides cross-site policy analysis of themes related to state education reform and the impact of state educational reforms on students with disabilities and special education programs. It analyzes state-level reforms in the general education policy areas of curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher development, and governance and explores local district implementation in each of these areas. Each case study site was selected because of its participation in the Consortium for Inclusive Schooling Practices. Sites included: (1) two large, diverse urban districts in California; (2) two rural, racially homogeneous districts in Missouri; (3) two rural/suburban districts with a high degree of student diversity in New Mexico; and (4) two fairly homogeneous suburban districts in Pennsylvania. The study was limited to kindergarten through grade 12 education programs and focused on students with disabilities rather than the gifted and talented who are sometimes included under special education. In spite of an emphasis by the states on standards-based curricula, these districts tended to focus on curriculum development supported by external funds, often part of integrated curriculum and instruction packages. Performance-based assessment has had benefits in terms of staff development, but not necessarily in terms of understanding student achievement levels. All the study states were putting increasing emphasis on accountability, but while state reforms were focused on improving the quality of teaching, local efforts centered on increasing the availability of teachers. State reforms fostering increased local governance have been well-received, and are being implemented. (SLD)

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State-Level Reforms in Education: District Response and the Implications for Special Education

Cross-Site Analysis Based on Four Case Studies

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National Association of State Boards of Education
Center for Policy Research on the Impact of
General and Special Education Reform

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INTRODUCTION

Center for Policy Research

The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (Center) is a national, collaborative project initiated in 1994 by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and two other organizations: the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland (UM), and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), now at the University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of the Center is to determine options for policymakers at the federal, state and local levels by investigating and examining the interaction of critical policy issues in general and special education. A principal focus of the Center's research is how such issues affect the education of students with disabilities.

Over the course of three years, the Center is scheduled to conduct extensive analyses across diverse state and local sites. CPRE is tracking general education reforms in 12 states; UM is conducting in-depth case studies in five local districts; and NASBE is conducting cumulative in-depth case studies in four states: California, Missouri, New Mexico and Pennsylvania.

The ***Center's Year 1 Technical Report***, released in March 1996, featured the work of CPRE. This report: (1) highlighted the salient features of general education reforms across 18 states; (2) provided a preliminary assessment of the nature and involvement of special education in these reforms; and (3) discussed implications of these reforms for students with disabilities and related emerging issues. The reform areas featured were: standards and curriculum; assessment; accountability, teacher licensure and professional development, finance and education governance. In addition, two federal programs were highlighted, Goals 2000 and School-to-Work.[1] This year's work features: the ***relationship*** between state reforms and local district implementation of those reforms; and ***issues regarding special education that are associated with local district implementation of those reforms***. The ***Center's*** third year report will be a cross-site analysis of five local district case studies conducted by UM.

NASBE's Role in the Center

NASBE's role in the Center is to provide in-depth policy analysis at the state level and to examine the implementation of policies by local districts, with an eye toward how students with disabilities and special education are treated and accommodated in these policies. In order to

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[1]Margaret Goertz and Diane Friedman, ***State Education Reform and Students With Disabilities: A Preliminary Analysis***. (March 1996) Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education.

conduct a cumulative case study in each state. NASBE staff are reviewing state policies and related documents and interviewing a variety of state and local district education personnel, parents, advocates and policymakers.

The Five Policy Areas of This Paper

Special education is not a separate program entirely, but rather a system of supports that may be utilized by general educators to provide additional assistance to students who have been identified as having a disability. As such, the general education program provides the context for describing special education policies and practices in major policy areas such as curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher development, and governance. For example, there is no special education curriculum developed by state departments of education, but rather sample adaptations and accommodations to curriculum frameworks that are utilized by special educators across a given state. Similarly, although there may be different rates of participation and different types of participation in a state assessment system, fundamentally, the assessment is the same for general and special education students who participate in the state's standard assessment.[2]

Having "cast our net broadly" to discern policy reforms in the study states and local districts, all of our data can be clustered into the eight policy areas. The six salient general education policy areas have been used by CPRE to track reforms for a number of years—Curriculum, Assessment, Accountability, Teacher Development, Governance, and Finance. Two additional special education areas emerged from our research—Eligibility for Special Education, and Special Education Service Delivery. This paper will focus on state-level reforms in five of the general education policy areas (Curriculum, Assessment, Accountability, Teacher Development, and Governance), local district implementation in each of these policy areas, and the implications for special education and students with disabilities.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to provide cross-site policy analysis of the themes related to state education reform, to examine local district responses to education reforms, and their impact on students with disabilities and special education at the local level. This paper draws on four

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[2]Two exceptions to this framework of six policy areas (curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher development, governance and finance) are ***service delivery models for special education*** and state and local policies that create the parameters for finding students ***eligible for special education***. These areas of special education reform are covered in the full technical report on which this paper is based.

parallel case studies completed for each of the four NASBE study states: California, Missouri, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. The four states were selected because they: (1) represented different geographic regions of the country, and (2) NASBE was already working with these four states on another special education policy project.[3] Hence, we were able to dovetail on the work and access data established through the other project.

During 1995 NASBE completed the first phase of each state case study by reviewing state reform policies and documents; and interviewing a variety of state policymakers, department of education personnel, advocates and legislative staff. Although their specific titles vary from state to state, state department staff were asked to identify the person who most closely filled the following positions:

State General Education
Director of curriculum
Director of assessment
Director of accountability
Director of school finance
Director of teacher policy
Director of governance/restructuring
Goals 2000 coordinator
School-to-Work coordinator
Chapter 1/Title 1 director
Director of bilingual education
Director of vocational education

State General and Special Education
Chair/Member - State Board of Education
Staff to relevant legislative committees

State Special Education
Director of special education
Special education advocacy organizations
SEA monitoring personnel
CSPD coordinator
Director of Statewide Systems Change Grants (where applicable)

In order to obtain an impression of how local districts in the study states are responding to reform initiatives, policies and programs, NASBE interviewed a variety of stakeholders in two local districts in each state during 1996. District personnel were asked to identify the following for district interviews:

- District ***superintendent*** or designee;
- District ***director of special education***;
- 3 ***principals*** of 1 elementary school, 1 middle school, and 1 high school, (same "feeder

[3]Simultaneous to this project, NASBE is also a partner in the *Consortium for Inclusive Schooling Practices* (86V-40007), an OSEP-funded project whose purpose is to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms in restructuring schools and in school reform in general.

pattern");

- 3-6 ***regular education teachers*** (1-2 teachers from each of the schools represented above);
- 3-6 ***special education teachers*** (1-2 teachers from each of the schools represented above);
- 3-6 ***parents of students with disabilities*** (1-2 parents from each of the schools represented above); and
- 3-6 ***parents of students without disabilities*** (1-2 parents from each of the schools represented above).

District policy documents and accountability reports were also reviewed. ***All data used in this paper were gathered between May 1995 and August 1996.***

This study is limited to K-12 education programs and does not include early childhood or preschool education nor post-secondary education. Finally, the study looks primarily at *students with disabilities* and does not include an exploration of issues regarding students labeled *gifted and talented*, although two of our study states include these students under special education.

Site Selection

As mentioned above, each NASBE case study state was selected because of its participation in the *Consortium for Inclusive Schooling Practices*, another OSEP-funded national project. In each state one district was selected that was affiliated with the *Consortium*. The second district in that state was selected to match demographically with the *Consortium* district. Districts were also selected so as to represent a range in degree of urbanicity and diversity across the states (as defined by the state). The districts were as follows:

- In ***California***, two large, diverse urban districts;
- In ***Missouri***, two rural, racially homogeneous districts;
- In ***New Mexico***, two rural/suburban districts with a high degree of student cultural diversity; and
- In ***Pennsylvania***, two fairly homogeneous suburban districts.

In addition to being matched on size, the districts were matched on percentage of students on free and reduced lunch and the percentage of non-white students in the district.

Research Methodology

This research relies primarily on qualitative methods. The data obtained through each source was used to enrich and advance the collection of future data, in order to paint a rich description of the reforms underway in each of the four study states and the responses by local districts to these reforms.

Benefits of Methodology

Qualitative methods offer important advantages over quantitative methods for studying policy development and implementation. Governmental decision making is multi-dimensional and multifaceted; policy is only one of a number of influences on organizations as they compete for resources and try to balance demands of their multiple constituencies.[4] Policy is continually adapting to its environment and decision-making in this context is constantly evolving. Because policy making and policy implementation are not discrete events but processes, Rist (1993) believes that qualitative inquiry can best capture salient data. In addition to being able to describe the *processes* of policy development, we were more likely to come to some findings serendipitously by using a case study methodology. ***In order to better understand the pace and consistency of reform in each of the four case study states, NASBE is returning to the states and local districts for follow-up interviews in 1996 and 1997.*** This provides an opportunity to broaden the documentation of policy possibilities and approaches and further explore any serendipitous findings.

This case study methodology is particularly useful as a follow up to last year's tracking study. One of the major findings of last year's work was that "special education has played a limited role in the design of standards-based reform policies in most of the [18] states in our study." The NASBE study has been able to follow up in-depth in areas where special education and students with disabilities have been considered and included in reforms. We will continue to describe ways in which states and local districts have developed policy strategies that seem to be supporting the inclusion of special education in school reform. These descriptions can provide the basis for further exploration, validation and, hopefully, the development of promising approaches to including students with disabilities in school reform efforts (as is one of the goals of the ***Center***).

Caveats to Methodology

Just as case studies can provide rich descriptions of discrete places and events, it must be

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[4]Rist R.C. (1993). Influencing the policy process with qualitative research. In N. Denszin and Y. Lincoln (eds.) ***Handbook of Qualitative Research***. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

noted that findings may be idiosyncratic to those discrete places and events. For instance, while only one of the four case study states has a high school graduation examination, seventeen states have some sort of student assessment required for graduation. In addition, qualitative data are dependent upon when the data were gathered, how questions are asked, who conducted interviews and the overall focus and nature of the study. Therefore, the reader is cautioned that these data are limited in their ability to be generalized without further validation across a large number of school districts and states.

The purpose in this paper is to describe the *relationships* among state policies and the policy response of local districts. The reader should note that the actual policies themselves are ever changing and hence, this paper provides merely a "snapshot" of state policy from May 1995 to August 1996. The findings of this paper are also bounded by two important caveats:

- *Policy rhetoric* often out paces *policy reality* at both the state and local level—this paper describes respondents' understanding of the policy and official documents that describe policy in the five policy areas. However, policy implementation does not always follow the rhetoric; and

- Even where policy rhetoric is implemented, the *policy reality* is highly variable among districts in the same state, among schools in the same district, and, in some instances, among classrooms within the same school. While we have tried to draw out themes for illustrative purposes, the reader should keep the highly variable context of education policy in mind.

Finally, this paper represents the findings of the NASBE investigation and should not be interpreted as an exhaustive review of the literature in the five policy areas of this paper.

Format of This Paper

After the ***Introduction***, the paper is divided into five policy areas: ***Curriculum***, ***Assessment***, ***Accountability***, ***Teacher Policy***, and ***Governance***. Each general education policy area is further divided into the following sections:

(1) *State-level reforms across the states* in the policy area;

(2) *Local district implementation* of reforms in that policy area; and

(3) *Local special education issues* regarding the reforms.

As we explore special education issues regarding the implementation of reform, it is

important to remember that the special education population overall is diverse. Often educators distinguish between students in high-prevalence disability categories, such as learning disabilities and mild mental retardation, and students in low-prevalence disability groups, such as severely retarded, blind or deaf. Many educators separate the special education student population and apply district policies differently to these two groups of students.

CURRICULUM

State-Level Reforms in Curriculum

As in most states, curriculum reform in our four case study states has focused primarily on state-level efforts to establish content and performance standards, rather than providing districts guidance on instructional methods. There has been some variation in how states are going about supporting standards development and their implementation through curriculum, as well as variation in how they use the "standards" terminology.[5] However, across our four states we found the following state-level trends in standards-based curricular reform:

- ***Models for district curricula***. States are trying to provide local districts with guidance in how to align their curricula with state standards while at the same time avoiding the imposition of a state-mandated curriculum and interfering with local control. Most states are accomplishing this through the development of curriculum frameworks and benchmarks for districts to use as models in developing their own curricula. For example, Missouri has also developed curriculum frameworks to assist districts in aligning their curricula with the state performance standards. The 1993 *Outstanding Schools Act* requires districts to align their curricula with the state standards within one year of their adoption by the State Board of Education. The state department of education contracted with the University of Missouri to develop model curriculum guides, as an option for districts in order to complete the required alignment within the one-year time limit.

- ***Accountability mechanisms***. Some of our states are also trying to hold students and/or districts accountable for these "voluntary" state curriculum standards, through accountability mechanisms that vary from state to state but include statewide assessments, graduation requirements, accreditation systems, and local district improvement plans. Other states have linked their curriculum standards to other policies such as textbook adoption and professional development. For example, New Mexico state content standards are being designed to provide models for the creation or revision of locally developed curriculum. These standards are to be reflected in each local district improvement plan (*Educational Plan for Student Success)*. In California, districts are not required to adopt the curriculum frameworks, but have generally implemented their

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[5]Although our study states differ somewhat in how they use the terms *content* and *performance standards*, *content standards* generally refer to broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire, while *performance standards* define and provide concrete examples of the desired levels of student achievement expected by the content standards (McLaughlin, Shepard and O'Day, 1995).

content because of links to statewide staff development, the state-funded textbook adoption process, and the content of prior statewide assessments.

- ***Differing stages***. States are at different stages in the development of standards, frameworks and benchmarks. For example, beginning in 1985, California has developed and since revised its curriculum frameworks in eight major subject areas, and now is revisiting its approach to reading and mathematics instruction in the early elementary grades. Pennsylvania first embarked on standards-based reform in the early 1990s. Under the influence of two different administrations, the focus has shifted from the development of broad student learning outcomes and model content standards in 1993 to more specific and rigorous academic standards in four basis content areas under the direction of a state commission appointed by the governor in 1996.

- ***National and local influences***. Most states have been heavily influenced by national projects in their standards development process and related curricular initiatives, but have also relied on local district personnel, businesses, and communities for input in the standards-setting process. In particular, the *National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)* standards and various systemic initiatives sponsored by the *National Science Foundation* have had considerable influence over state-level mathematics and science standards and curricular efforts. The *New Standards Project* has also influenced state-level curriculum initiatives by focusing on the development of performance standards and assessments for English/language arts, mathematics, science, and applied learning, to be given at the end of 4th, 8th and 10th grades.[6]

- ***School-to-Work.*** Some of our case study states have also encouraged districts to restructure their secondary curriculum around School-to-Work principles, although this emphasis is not necessarily linked to state-level standards setting activities. For example, Missouri's *Outstanding Schools Act (SB 380)* established the "A+ School Program" which requires that participating secondary schools eliminate the "general education track." A+ schools must also establish partnerships with local businesses, labor leaders, parents, and representatives of colleges and post-secondary vocational and technical schools, in order to develop a plan to support student learning along a variety of career paths. In a similar fashion, California and New Mexico have encouraged districts to restructure their curricula around School-to-Work concepts through curriculum documents like *Second to None* and the *Education System for Employability*, respectively. The volume of activity in this area is especially significant because School-to-Work is

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[6]The needs of students with disabilities are not specifically addressed in materials produced by national standards-based efforts like the *New Standards Project*, and this oversight potentially warrants further study.

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generally not coordinated with *Goals 2000* efforts in these states or with other state-level standards-setting efforts.

Local District Implementation of Curriculum Reforms

At the district level, there have been two spheres of activity regarding curriculum reform:

- In response to the state-level efforts to establish standards, districts have undertaken a number of efforts to implement standards through various curriculum development activities.

- District attention has also been occupied by a variety of other curricular innovations or programmatic priorities that may or may not be perceived by district staff as linked to state standards.

Standards-Based Curriculum Development Activities

Our four case study states are at various stages of establishing content and performance standards, benchmarks and frameworks, and have taken somewhat different approaches and used different terminology. Still four trends regarding local district implementation of state curriculum standards clearly emerged from our district interviews:

- States have established a clear expectation that the responsibility for developing curricula to meet state standards should fall on the districts.

- District capacity to develop curriculum aligned with state standards activities appears to be related to the district's size and it's ability to attract projects to support curriculum efforts.

- Districts vary in how they manage curriculum development, but rely primarily on outside resources such as national projects and state-sponsored regional consortia.

- As districts are reviewing curriculum, some may first focus on aligning their curriculum with *current* statewide assessments rather than state curriculum frameworks (which may be the foundation for new statewide assessments).

Other Curricular Innovations

When asked about curriculum reform, district personnel listed a variety of programmatic priorities, that were often not perceived by district staff as ***linked*** to state standards.

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- These other curricular innovations tend to come as an integrated grade-level package of curriculum and instruction, which provides classroom instructional practices or a framework for what teachers are supposed to do.

- ***At the elementary level***, the districts we studied were implementing curriculum initiatives which emphasize developmentally appropriate practices, reading and literacy, and thematic units.

- ***At the middle/junior high school level***, several of the districts we visited have organized their grade levels and curriculum around the middle school concept, with students and teachers grouped by teams and curriculum integrated around thematic units.

- ***At the high school level***, most of the districts we visited were focusing their curriculum and instructional efforts around School-to-Work or similar objectives, and block scheduling.

- In the majority of districts we visited, these "other" curriculum innovations were cited as the ***focus*** of reforms and restructuring efforts by teachers, principals and administrators, rather than the development of curricula aligned with state standards or curriculum frameworks. The extent to which district personnel focus on state standards versus these other programmatic priorities may depend on the following factors: ***timing***, ***resources***, or the ***nature of initiatives.***

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Curriculum Reforms

As we considered the various state-level curriculum reforms and how districts have responded to these reforms, including the development of their own initiatives, we were struck by two issues which have been raised as districts attempt to implement these curriculum reforms with ***all*** students, including students with disabilities.

- Study districts appear to be having more difficulty including students with disabilities in standards-based curriculum reforms than in some of the other curriculum initiatives, such as block scheduling, described above. Districts are experiencing the most difficulty including students with *severe cognitive* disabilities in standards-based curricula.

- Some of the curriculum initiatives that are not seen as necessarily linked to standards-based reform may lend themselves to supporting students with disabilities, in part because the type of *classroom instructional strategies and practices* that they bring are better suited to students with disabilities.

ASSESSMENT

As the public continues to demand increased accountability from its schools and as schools administrators and policymakers increase their use of performance and outcome data for decision making, people are paying more attention to who gets tested, what kinds of tests are used, and what the data mean. First, it is important to understand that students can be assessed for a wide variety of purposes:[7]

- Diagnosing individual students (*e.g.*, assessing developmental status, monitoring and communicating student progress, certifying competency);
- Improving instruction (*e.g.*, evaluating instruction, modifying instructional strategies, identifying instructional needs);
- Evaluating programs; or
- Providing accountability information.

For example, basic competency exams are being used by states primarily to certify the competency of individual students for graduation, while writing tests have multiple functions: to determine the writing ability of individual students, to evaluate instruction, and to improve instruction by helping students and teachers understand the essential requirements of good written communication.

It is also important to understand that there are multiple kinds of tests, even within state assessment systems. For example, state assessments vary on the following characteristics: the subject areas and grade levels tested, the item formats used, and the type of skills tested (basic skills versus higher-order thinking skills). Any assessment reforms may be implemented selectively with different kinds of testing.

And depending on the purpose of the tests, results can be reported at several different levels: by student, classroom, grade, school, district, state, or at a national level. Although it is important to keep in mind the different purposes and levels of assessment in education, this report will focus on those types of assessment that are primarily implemented at the state and district levels.

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[7]From *The ABCs of School Testing Leader's Guide*, Joint Committee on Testing Practices, National Council on Measurement in Education and American Psychological Association.

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State-Level Reforms in Assessment

In most states and in our four case study states, assessment reform, as an integral part of standards-based reform, has focused on developing statewide tests that are aligned with the state content and performance standards. There has been considerable variation in how states are going about developing these new statewide assessments, the status of the process, and the consequences of the results. However, notable among our four case study states (as well as the ***Center's*** larger Year 1 sample of 18 states) were the following trends in assessment reform:

- With the first wave of standards-based assessment reforms, many statewide assessments shifted from norm- or criterion-referenced standardized tests of basic skills to performance-based tests which measure higher-order skills and are aligned with the new curriculum standards.

- More recently, states have sought a balance between performance-based assessment items and items that test basic skills.

- Roughly one-third of the states[8], and two of our study states, have already established or are moving toward a graduation exam and/or diploma endorsements based on assessments in different subject areas, in order to demonstrate that students have met state standards.

- Some states are experimenting with portfolio assessment, primarily in writing, but relying mostly on districts to develop and implement portfolio assessments for instructional purposes.

- In those states that have implemented performance-based assessment, both state and district-level staff have reported that teachers and classroom instruction have benefitted from the professional development aspects of developing and scoring performance-based items. In particular, educators have noted that having teachers score writing assessments has improved writing instruction and student writing skills.

Local District Implementation of Assessment Reforms

There has been considerable national and state rhetoric about using alternative forms of

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[8]According to a 1996 survey of state education policies, 17 states currently require students to pass a proficiency test to receive a high school diploma (*Key State Education Policies on K-12 Education: Content Standards, Graduation, Teacher Licensure, Time and Attendance*, Council for Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC: October 1996).

student assessment at all levels—national, state, district, and classroom. States have been instrumental in developing performance-based assessment methodologies for statewide assessments. But the remaining activity in developing diverse assessment methodologies has occurred primarily at the district level, where experiments with portfolio assessment and student exhibitions have been implemented.

Although our four case study states have varied somewhat in their approaches to and pacing of statewide assessment reform, two trends clearly emerged from our district-level interviews regarding LEA implementation of state assessment reform:

- Although some states are developing portfolio assessments for accountability purposes, primarily in the area of writing, they are relying on districts to develop performance-based methodologies like portfolios and student exhibitions for instructional purposes.

- One study district is moving toward a certificate of initial mastery, essentially a district-generated graduation exam, independent of any state efforts to develop graduation exams.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Assessment Reforms

The *National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)* has been funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to research a number of issues relating to the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessments and assessment reforms. Rather than repeat their findings, we will focus on how districts in our case study states have implemented state policies regarding assessment and students with disabilities. As we looked at the participation of students with disabilities in assessment reform across our eight districts, the following issues have surfaced as most significant:

- While written state policy encourages the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, it also has allows districts considerable leeway in interpreting these policies. Although districts consider several factors in determining student participation in assessments, including their accountability systems, most districts fall back on the policy that participation is an IEP team decision.

- In determining the extent to which students with disabilities will be included in assessments and their achievement reported, educators consider the simultaneous interplay between reporting and exclusion guidelines at both the state and local level.

- Some districts have an assessment policy regarding the participation of students with disabilities that supersedes the state policy.

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- Valid district data on the extent to which students with disabilities are participating in these statewide assessments and their performance are still difficult to obtain.

- As with state officials, there is a widely held belief among district officials that alternative forms of assessment, such as performance-based and portfolio assessment, are well-suited to students with disabilities because they are more easily accommodated and will perform better on such tests.

ACCOUNTABILITY/MONITORING

There are many facets to state accountability policies. This section focuses on two primary aspects of accountability:

- *Institutional accountability*, which encompasses district- and school-level accreditation, compliance monitoring and required district strategic planning. Institutional accountability is most closely related to special education monitoring. This chapter begins with a discussion of institutional accountability and monitoring.

- *Individual student accountability*, which encompasses high school graduation requirements, diploma options and grading procedures. This chapter ends with a discussion of accountability from the individual student perspective.

Student assessment, as discussed in the last section, is an important part of both institutional and individual student accountability. Since statewide assessment was already discussed, it will not be fully discussed again in this chapter.

State-Level Reforms in Institutional Accountability

Many states have had accountability mechanisms for some time. These systems were largely based on the "inputs" to the system and the level of resources in a district, such as the number of square feet of classroom space provided per child, or the number of appropriately credentialed teachers on staff. These resource attributes were typically reviewed as part of an overall school accreditation process performed by the state or other independent accreditation association. Yet, by the mid 1980s, there was a prevailing feeling among policy makers that attending only to the processes and inputs to the education system was not necessarily leading to increased student achievement.

Policy makers' concerns over student achievement were articulated during the 1986 Governor's Summit. At the conclusion of the Summit, the Governors called for creating greater flexibility in the education system, but with a commensurate increase in responsibility for student outcomes by local districts, schools and teachers. The Governors called for decentralizing authority and providing greater latitude in decision-making to district- and building-level educators, closer to the student level. But this freedom, reasoned the Governors, should come with the proviso that districts, schools and educators be held accountable for student outcomes in ways that they had not been in the past. The Summit, coupled with the spread of the standards-based, systemic reform movement, has lead to a renewed interest and reforms in state accountability systems.

Two of the study states are accommodating this reform within their current accountability structure and merely changing some elements of the structure, while the other two have employed a new approach to accountability. Of our study states, California and Missouri have shifted the focus of their accountability systems toward student outcomes, using primarily the same accountability procedures that they used in the past, while New Mexico and Pennsylvania have adopted new long-range strategic planning processes with student outcomes as an important element of the district plan.

Among the study states, reforms in accountability have centered around the following themes:

- Accountability reforms have encouraged districts to reflect state priorities, while at the same time permitting districts local control to focus on their own concerns.
- There is a shift in accountability systems away from inputs to focus more on student outcomes.
- Accountability indicators are now more closely aligned with state curriculum standards.
- Reforms in accountability have tended to expand the levels of accountability within the study states. That is, rather than just district-level accountability or school-level accountability or student-level accountability, the systems are moving toward holding districts, schools *and* students accountable.
- Accountability reforms have moved toward greater degrees of integration between monitoring federal programs and monitoring the basic education program.
- All of our states are trying to include special education in their general education accountability systems, for either philosophical reasons (i.e., "inclusion") or because of decreases in personnel, or both. But states report a tension in trying to merge the two systems when special education monitoring continues to focus on process and procedures while general education accountability emphasizes student outcomes.

Local District Implementation of Institutional Accountability Reforms

Two major themes emerged from the study districts with respect to new state accountability systems:

- As with state accountability models, there is a greater focus on student outcomes in those study districts that have their own accountability systems.

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- Districts vary in the degree to which they are aware and/or influenced by the state accountability system. This may be due to a variety of reasons, including: district size; the mere existence of the district's own accountability system; the consequences attached to state accountability models; the existence of more pressing, competing issues in the district; and the degree to which the district is performing successfully on the state indicators.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Institutional Accountability Reforms

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, student assessment is an important part of both institutional and individual student accountability. The bottom line for performance-based accountability systems is: ***Do students with disabilities participate in the assessment and are their scores reported?*** This issue was discussed at length in the ***Assessment*** section.

With respect to special education monitoring and institutional accountability:

- District perceptions of special education monitoring varies. Special education monitoring is still seen as separate from general education monitoring and process-oriented, rather than focusing on student outcomes.

- In two of our study states, monitoring is seen as uneven across districts. One district may be found out of compliance for the same practices that are not cited in another district's monitoring visit.

- Generally districts feel ambivalent about special education monitoring. This ambivalence is born of the fundamental debate over whether a process-oriented compliance monitoring system can contribute to good programmatic outcomes.

Local District Student-Level Accountability Reforms

For individual students, high school graduation is a paramount concern, followed by differentiated diplomas and grading policies. Students first want to know if they will graduate and, if so, with what type of diploma. The type of diploma in some instances is dictated by the student's grade point average.

- In one district, officials are reforming high school graduation requirements and expanding the diploma options offered to the general education student population.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Student-Level Accountability Reform

Parents, teachers and students alike are concerned with the impact of new graduation, grading and diploma requirements on students with disabilities. Overall, the policies seem to be somewhat ill-defined as district personnel are concentrating on defining these policies for the general student population first.

- Most state and district high school graduation policies in our study states create a system that can be highly subject to manipulation by parents, teachers and administrators.

- Some districts are grappling with the meaning of differentiated diplomas when certificates of attendance are routinely granted to students with disabilities as well as other students who have not met state graduation standards.

- Including students with disabilities in curriculum reforms has also raised concerns about district grading policies.

TEACHER POLICY

For purposes of this report, *teacher policy* is divided into two sections: *teacher licensure* and *professional development*.

TEACHER LICENSURE

State-Level Reforms in Teacher Licensure

Teacher licensure is primarily a state function, in conjunction with teacher education programs. Local districts do not license teachers per se. Several reforms in teacher licensure have occurred over the past five to seven years. Five trends were documented in the ***Center's Year 1 Technical Report***[9]:

- States are beginning to move from licensure based on completion of required courses to performance-based licensure systems that focus on authentic documentation of what teachers know and can do.
- Many states are requiring prospective teachers to major in an academic area, rather than or in addition to education.
- States are expanding the continuum of licenses (from temporary to permanent).
- Like student testing, teacher assessment systems are moving beyond basic skills and are incorporating more varied testing formats, such as portfolios, assessment centers, and mechanisms for evaluating the performance of beginning teachers in the classroom.
- Most states allow individuals with a college degree to seek certification as a teacher through an alternative route. The requirements for alternative routes vary widely among the states, however.

Interestingly, while states are primarily focused on improving the *quality* of fully licensed teachers, the study districts are primarily concerned with improving the *availability* of fully licensed teachers. Of the eight study districts, six expressed concerns with their supply of fully

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[9] The ***Center's*** first year technical report documented these reforms, using several examples from the four target states of this study. Another source for additional information on state reforms in special education teacher licensure is the *National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education*, housed at the Council for Exceptional Children, and funded by the Office for Special Education Programs, U. S. Department of Education.

licensed teachers. The two California districts attributed their teacher shortages to their rapidly growing and diverse student population in a urban environment where many new teachers are reluctant to teach. The two Missouri districts attributed their teacher shortages to their rural nature and general isolation. The two New Mexico districts, however, attributed their teacher shortages to the state context of low teacher pay.

One of our case study states, New Mexico, is trying to address statewide teacher shortages by increasing the salaries of the state's teachers so that they approach or achieve parity with regional and national averages. In addition, state officials have identified and deployed better recruiting procedures to train and hire teachers who will stay in New Mexico rather than go to neighboring states for higher salaries. Finally, the state is encouraging institutions of higher education to include more hands-on experiences for teaching students early in their program so that they are better prepared for the realities of the classroom and, hopefully, more likely to stay in teaching.

Local District Implementation of Teacher Licensure Reforms

As mentioned above, teacher licensure primarily impacts districts in their ability to obtain properly licensed teachers. The following issues emerged from the local districts:

- Many rural and urban districts struggle to maintain a fully credentialed faculty.
- In addition to chronic teacher shortages, special policies and programs can make teacher shortages worse (*e.g.*, class size reduction, early retirement).
- Districts handle these shortages in different ways. Many districts are forced to request waivers or emergency certificates in order to fully staff their programs.
- In order to address teacher shortages, some school districts are creating special relationships with universities to develop training programs that are offered in the district and lead to teacher certification in shortage areas.
- Two of our study districts have honed their efforts to meet the needs of new teachers and those factors that will enhance retention of new teachers.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Teacher Licensure Reforms

Many of problems related to teacher shortages for general education are exacerbated in special education. This is because fewer teachers elect to pursue a career in special education in

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the first place and, in states like California, the requirements for licensure lengthen the preparation period. Furthermore, special education is viewed as a challenging area in which to teach, leading to higher rates of teacher "burnout" among special education teachers. Districts experience chronic shortages year after year. Districts have developed a variety of ways to ***accommodate special education teacher shortages***, including:

- Emergency waivers;
- Partnerships with universities;
- Non-categorical service delivery; and
- Reclassifying students to the categories for which teachers are certified.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

State-Level Reforms in Professional Development

Traditionally, ***professional development has primarily been the responsibility of the local districts***. However, we observed four state-level trends of note from our case study states:

- Among our study states, there has been a renewed interest in professional development, although few actual programmatic changes as of yet.
- Although the primary responsibility for designing and implementing professional development programs resides with the local districts, states still have mechanisms for reflecting state reform priorities in the district professional development plans.
- States are increasingly recognizing the development and the scoring of performance assessment items as a form of professional development.
- Two of our study states have established mentor or lead teacher programs as a mechanism to support teacher professional development.

As we have said, with few notable exceptions, professional development has primarily been the purview of the local districts, and state programs, when they existed, were often viewed by teachers as having little utility in the classroom. And, in times of tight budgets, professional development was seen as an easy target for cutting since it was deemed as not directly impacting the classroom. State-level professional development has often come in the form of small amounts of money embedded in categorical programs, designated to be used for the training of teachers funded through that program.

One exception to this pattern among our study sites is California. California has funded a number of professional development initiatives over the years. In FY 1994-95, California spent about $106 million of state funds on professional development (about 1.8 percent of the state's annual education funds). Several professional development activities are available through the state; many funded since 1987 through SB 1882. Although California funds local districts directly for many of its professional development activities, the state also funds a number of networks to support teacher development throughout the state.

Local District Implementation of Professional Development Reforms

Several themes emerged with respect to local district implementation of professional development programs and policies:

- Study districts have developed a greater appreciation for professional development and the necessity of creating district-wide professional development plans.

- Even within the same state structure, districts have taken very different approaches to creating professional development plans.

- Site-based management has played a significant role in determining the actual professional development activities of teachers.

- Study districts are also recognizing the value of scoring of performance-based assessments as a professional development tool.

- Special projects, funded by private or federal sources, heavily influence district professional development with their particular reform focus.

- The multitude of professional development efforts, generated at all levels of the system, has lead districts and schools to explore ways in which they can link multiple professional development requirements, primarily of categorical programs, both programmatically and financially.

- Two of our study districts have established mentor or lead teacher programs as a mechanism to support teacher professional development.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Professional Development Reforms

Overall, there seems to be ***less differentiation between special and general educators*** with respect to participation in professional development programs. This is due to:

- The need for special educators to learn about the district's curriculum at the same time general educators are learning about the curriculum reforms;

- The need for general educators to learn how to serve an increasingly diverse student population, with a multitude of special needs, while special educators learn to work with a variety of identified student needs within special education; and

- Programs that are sponsored by special education being specifically geared toward *all* teachers.

This is especially true in small, rural districts where teachers are more likely to "wear several hats" and be involved in various aspects of the school program. Local district respondents

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consistently noted that teacher training opportunities were designed for "everybody," without a distinction between special and general educators.

GOVERNANCE

State-Level Reforms in Governance

Governance policies fundamentally relate to who makes the decisions about how schools are ruled and funds are allocated. State reforms in governance have generally centered around two strategies:

- Structural reforms[10], such as decentralizing authority through site-based management, and creating charter schools; and
- Procedural reforms, such as granting waivers from state policies and regulations, and deregulating portions of the educational program.

Structural Reforms

Site-Based Management

Structural reforms, such as ***site-based management***, are a vestige of the "restructuring" reform movement. School restructuring has become a popular approach to education reform over the past seven to eight years. School restructuring looks at decentralizing authority, decision-making and resources, and collaborating among affected groups to achieve goals. It attempts to dramatically change the way school decisions are made and who makes them, largely by shifting decision-making to the school site.

Of our four study states, California and New Mexico are the two states that have supported site-based management as a reform strategy. In California, SB 1274 funded planning and demonstration grants, administered by the California Department of Education, to encourage more school districts to implement site-based decision-making or school-based management, with the ultimate goal of improved student learning. In New Mexico, the State Board of Education has encouraged decision-making at the local level, in part through various district and

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[10]Note: As discussed in the first section of this paper, the generalization of study findings is somewhat limited by the case study methodology. For governance, our findings are further bounded by the fact that only three of the four states have provisions for charter schools. Only two of the eight study districts had charter schools. Only two of the study states actively support site-based management. For a fuller discussion of students with disabilities in charter schools, see *"Charter Schools and Students with Disabilities,"* by M. McLaughlin, et.al, Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, September 1996.

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school initiatives in site-based management. And site-based management is a major focus of *Re:Learning*, a national school restructuring initiative which has taken hold in many New Mexico districts.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are another governance reform that many states have recently enacted. Charter schools are autonomous public schools created and operated under a contract, or charter, that specifies the school's educational plan, expected outcomes, assessment procedures, management, and compliance with other requirements (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1995).[11] Of the study states, three have some form of charter school legislation: New Mexico, California and Missouri. All three of the state's original authorizing legislation limited the number of charter schools that could be created in the state. In New Mexico, the number was limited to five. In California and Missouri, the number was limited to 100 and 3, respectively.

These schools are freed from the bulk of state regulation either by fiat or by making specific requests for waivers from state regulations. In California, the charter legislation lays out a procedure for individuals to petition local school boards to establish charter schools which are then exempt from state laws governing school districts (but not from federal regulations and requirements). The three Missouri "charter-type" schools must be run by five-person management teams, and largely are free from state regulation. The charters granted were "not available to for-profit entities." In New Mexico, charter schools can seek waivers from some provisions of state statute and regulation for the purpose of providing class size and structural flexibility, alternative curriculum opportunities and alternative budget opportunities.

Charter schools are held accountable in different ways. In California, the schools are held accountable for complying with provisions of their own charters. In Missouri, the "charter-type" schools are only subject to state assessments. New Mexico charter schools must still go through the local school board for budget approval so they do not have very much autonomy within their district.

Procedural Reforms

Waivers

Procedural reforms, such as ***granting waivers*** are available in all states. The most common waivers requested are those with respect to teacher licensure and class size. California

[11]Bierlein, L. & Mulholland, L. (April, 1995). *Charter school update and observations regarding initial trends and impacts*. Policy Brief, Morrison Institute of Public Policy, Arizona State University.

has a well-developed process for districts to request waivers, and the districts report that the process is fairly smooth and not overly burdensome. The Department of Education analyzes waiver requests to look for patterns in regulations that appear to be problematic for districts. In New Mexico the *Collaborative School Improvement Act* allows districts to request waivers from state laws and regulations if the district can develop a well-defined plan of how it will do things differently. These waivers can apply to, for example, the length of the school day, staffing patterns, subject areas, or purchase of instructional materials. The *Alternative Curricular Plan* allows waivers relating to individual class load and teaching load requirements.

Regulatory Relief

States have also looked to provide regulatory relief for districts by studying portions of the school code and accompanying regulations that may be eliminated. In Pennsylvania, the Governor has included measures in proposed legislation to reduce state regulation and increase local flexibility. He called for the complete review of all education regulations and reducing the number of education mandates. Thus far, his proposals have not received sufficient support in the state legislature although they will most likely resurface during the next legislative session. In California, the Department of Education undertook a study of the School Code with an eye toward those areas that might be eliminated. The results of the review were submitted to the state legislature for action during the 1995-96 legislative session. The legislature, in turn, proposed establishing a committee to undertake much of the same work. Ultimately the bill was not passed. However, as with Pennsylvania, the issue is anticipated to resurface during the next legislative session.

Local District Implementation of Governance Reforms

Governance themes that surfaced locally based on state reforms were in the areas of *site-based management*, *charter schools*, and increased local flexibility through *waivers*.

Site-Based Management:

- As implemented, site-based management is uneven across schools, not every school in the district has a viable site council, nor are they equally effective.
- Districts differ in the degree of autonomy school sites have under site-based management which contributes to tremendous variation in the areas in which school site councils make decisions.
- Although teachers' organizations strongly support site-based management, some teachers feel that they do not have the time to be fully involved in school decisions.

- Site-based management can be a vehicle for accommodating more variations in school restructuring and reform.

Charter Schools:

- The culture of the district may influence the extent to which charter school options are considered, and what they look like.

Deregulation/Waivers:

- Without a waiver, our two large urban districts report that they would probably have proceeded with the innovative practice anyway. Factors that may influence this decision include size, reputation for reform in the district, and potential sanctions a district might incur through the state's accountability system.

Local Special Education Issues Regarding Governance Reform

Through this investigation, the issues that surfaced regarding special education primarily had to do with site-based management and deregulation.

- In districts that employ site-based management, schools have more flexibility in how categorical funds are specifically allocated, including special education funds.

- As with other aspects of the education program, special education reform in site-based managed schools is closely tied to the individual school's motivations for reform, rather than district or state-level initiatives.

- Our study districts practicing site-based management found that encouraging innovative practices in a decentralized governance structure can be complex. While decentralized governance structures provide districts and schools *greater flexibility to reform*, individual schools have a great deal of *discretion over whether or not they will reform*.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored state-level reform in five policy areas (curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher development and governance), local district implementation in these same policy areas, and the special education issues raised as a result. The Center is also exploring state-level reforms in general and special education finance, and reforms pertaining specifically to special education (*i.e.*, special education eligibility and service delivery). In very broad terms, we have found that:

- Our study states are at various stages in implementing reforms in these general policy areas.

- Although our study districts are very aware of this reform context and in many cases responding directly to state-level reforms, they are also reacting to competing reform priorities within their own district, often in response to the challenging needs of increasingly diverse student populations.

- Special education has generally not been involved at the state level in the conceptualization or development of general education reforms.

- Consequently, special education's lack of involvement in general education policy development may be reflected at the local level in district's inability to fully include special education and students with disabilities in some of their reforms, particularly standards-based reforms.

However, it may simply be "too early to tell" how students with disabilities will ultimately fare in this reform context. As districts attempt to implement state-level reform policies, states are having to fine-tune their reforms, both in response to district-level implementation concerns but also sometimes in reaction to changing state political environments. Since gathering the data for this paper, we have completed another round of state-level data collection and are in the midst of another round of district-level site visits. Reform is definitely a "moving target" as states continue to refine their reform strategies. And full implementation at the district level is a very slow process, especially in light of the multi-year phase-in periods for reforms in curriculum, assessment, accountability and teacher licensure and professional development.

As we continue to review our rather voluminous findings and make some sense out of them, we have been however particularly struck with the following observations:

- ***Curriculum.*** Despite the state emphasis on standards-based curriculum activities, our study districts tend to focus on curriculum development supported by external funds

which is not always standards-based, but more often part of integrated curriculum and instruction packages. Many of these "non-standards-based initiatives" have been developed to address the needs of diverse learners who traditionally have not fared well in our schools, and consequently these initiatives are well-suited to students with disabilities. Our districts are also relying heavily on school-to-work principles in reforming their secondary curricula, which are also well-suited to the learning needs of many students with disabilities. Most of our districts, however, are not far enough along in implementing standards-based curricula, so it's too soon to tell whether students with disabilities will be included.

- ***Assessment.*** Performance-based assessment has had its greatest benefit in terms of teacher development, but not necessarily in helping our study states and districts understand student achievement levels. As a result, many states are revisiting their assessment policies and are now providing a mix of norm-referenced and performance-based assessments. Although there is a widely held belief by both state- and district-level educators that alternative forms of assessment, such as performance-based tests and portfolios, are better suited to students with disabilities because they are more easily accommodated and will perform better on tasks, this remains an untested hypothesis. Valid data regarding the participation of students with disabilities in state assessments and their performance remains difficult to obtain, despite state efforts to encourage their participation. In determining the extent to which students with disabilities are included in assessments, educators consider the simultaneous interplay between reporting and exclusion guidelines at both the state and local levels.

- ***Accountability.*** Our study states are putting an increasing emphasis on student, school, and district accountability. At the same time, these states are trying to coordinate, and sometimes integrate special education monitoring into their general education accountability systems, for philosophical reasons (inclusion), or because of decreases in SEA personnel, or both. Under current circumstances, however, it may be impossible to fully include special education and students with disabilities in state general education accountability systems because of a fundamental mismatch in monitoring for outcomes versus process indicators. While state general education accountability systems are moving away from input and process indicators to focus on program quality indicators and student learning outcomes at the school or district-level, special education continues to focus on procedural indicators at the student-level, heavily based on the student's IEP.

- ***Teacher Licensure.*** While state reforms are primarily focused on improving the ***quality*** of fully licensed teachers, the study districts are primarily concerned with increasing the availability of fully licensed teachers. This situation is of particular concern in special education where teacher shortages are more severe. It is thus more likely that a provisional special education teacher will be faced with the demands of including

students with disabilities in a new, more challenging standards-based curriculum or implementing other district-level reforms

- ***Professional Development***. As in the area of curriculum, special projects and outside funds direct much of the professional development focus in our study districts. Although this can have a splintering effect, it has also caused some districts to be more creative in how they use their professional development funds, pooling them where possible to provide professional development that meets the needs of multiple programs as well as district priorities. This may also facilitate the integration of special and general education professional development. In fact, we found less differentiation among general and special education teachers in professional development in our study districts. While special educators are now attending workshops to learn about new curricula with general educators, general education teachers are being trained along side their special education colleagues to learn instructional techniques for students with diverse learning needs.

- ***Governance.*** To give districts and schools greater flexibility to reform, state policies have encouraged more decentralized governance structures such as charter schools, site-based management, and deregulation. In our study districts, this greater flexibility has allowed schools to be more creative in how they serve students, for example when site-based councils have pooled categorical resources to meet multiple student needs (*e.g.*, Title I, special education). On the other hand, this increased flexibility, especially with respect to site-based management, has not always been accompanied by sufficient accountability mechanisms to ensure that students with disabilities are getting the most appropriate educational services.